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## PERFECTING THE ART OF ACTIVE LISTENING

Golden rules to follow

Lisa Kelly

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Personal excellence is an inward out process. It is not really about making yourself better than everyone else; in fact it is a strive to improve your performance throughout so that you can be a better individual than you were yesterday. It helps to improve your relationships, career, finances and your overall approach to life. So, what are the qualities required to be a better individual? From confidence to motivation, courage to contentment, drive to willpower, the list is endless... In this edition of Personal Excellence, our cover article *Perfecting the Art of Active Listening* by Lisa Kelley also speaks about one such skill for personal growth and excellence- the art of active listening. She discusses in detail about how this critical life skill brings about positive changes in life. We always are under the impression that we are good listeners, but the truth is that most of us are not active listeners at all. Isn't it true that we prefer talking than listening? When we argue, we never listen to the other person. Instead we are busy formulating on how we should hit back through words. We do not like to listen. And how is an active listener different from a passive one? The former listens with his/her ears, eyes, head and heart. So where do you stand? Only if you are totally involved in the listening process you can grow your relationships and trust with others, build morale of friends, families and co-workers and provide a communication pathway for creativity, partnership and invention. Lisa's

article is a definite eye opener that will make you ponder over the question, "Why are so many of us poor listeners?" She also provides tips that can help you improve your active listening skills. Yet another interesting article that will help you make the path to excellence an interesting ride is Christine Chen's *Journey to Excellence*. She puts forth a suggestion to face each day with an attitude of excellence. She feels, pursuing excellence and doing a job to the best of our ability not only creates a positive environment but can be exciting and each day could actually be thrilling. The article oozes out fresh energy and readers can feel it immediately. Work is definitely worship, but that doesn't mean its all work and no life. Jeff Davidson through his article *Balancing Life and Work* talks about 21 ways that professionals with work-life balance are different from others. A thought-provoking read especially for today's generation. In brief, this edition of Personal Excellence Essentials is a right platform for all those who want to bring about a change and excel in life. Read, enjoy and do send your feedback!



Regards,  
Debbie McGrath  
HR.com

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# Perfecting the Art of Active Listening

## Golden rules to follow

By Lisa Kelly



“If speaking is silver, then listening is gold.” (Turkish proverb)

Through this article, *Perfecting the art of Active Listening*, we will explore the reasons many of us fail at listening, we will gain an understanding of the critical importance of active listening in interpersonal relationships and we will learn skill-building techniques that can help transform us from a passive to an active listener.

To begin this journey of discovery and understanding, we first need to examine the “Why”: Why are so many of us poor listeners? Is it a genetically inherited trait or a socially developed one? I posit that the answer perhaps lies in the following five reasons:

1. **Lack of formal training opportunities:** How often do you see an “Active Listening Skills” workshop or university course advertised? Rarely, I would argue. The reality is that many receive more training in written communications but limited, if any, in active listening skill development, which is why many of us would rather talk than listen, we simply have not mastered this skill.

2. **We possess the ability to think faster than we speak:** The average person speaks at a rate of 125 words per minute however, we possess the mental capacity to receive and process words up to 400 words per minute (Lee & Hatesohl, n.d.). This provides us 75% extra capacity for “mental chatter” or perhaps “mental multi-tasking” of the errands we need to run or the work sitting on our desk

3. **We practise lazy and inattentive listening habits:** Studies have shown that many of us retain only 50% of what is spoken after a 10-minute oral presentation. Within a couple of days that retention drops another 50% to a final level of **25% efficiency**. Simply stated, we tend to process and retain only 25% of what we hear (Lee & Hatesohl, n.d.). Moreover, we often joke that our spouses use selective listening, but the sad reality is that many of us are “selective

listeners in life”. By way of example, how many of us keyboard at work or at home when we are on the phone or check our text messages when we should be fully attuned to the person speaking to us?

4. **We lose our listening skills as we develop:** Research reveals that as kids progress through school their listening skills decline with each year, dropping from 90% in elementary grades down to 28% in high school (Nichols, 1957, cited in Lee & Hatesohl, n.d.).

5. **We fall victim to listening roadblocks** such as mental fatigue or lack of interest in the person’s message.

**By comparison, an “active listener” is characterized as one who:**

- listens with their ears, eyes, head and heart;
- processes and internalizes a speaker’s words and feelings;
- puts themselves in the speaker’s shoes; and
- checks for clarity and understanding of a message.

At this point, you may be wondering why I am raising concern about a basic skill that we supposedly use and develop every day. My simple response is that we need only consider the increasing breakdown in marriages or our youth’s diminishing verbal skills to illustrate the negative impacts of our inactive listening skills in both personal and professional relationships.

“Active listening” is a critical life skill as it:

- ✓ is essential to building relationships and trust with others;
- ✓ builds morale of friends, families and co-workers;
- ✓ supports us in making important business decisions; and
- ✓ provides a communication pathway for creativity, partnership and invention.

**So how do we become active listeners?**

1. We begin by “**being fully present**”: we give the speaker our **full attention** and park any biases, judgements or “mental rebuttals”.

2. We **use reassuring body language** and gestures to convey our attention such as smiling, nodding, or leaning in to show we are interested, and/or words such as “yes” or “I see”.

3. We “**Listen with Heart**” by reflecting empathy, sincerity and curiosity, especially during emotionally-charged conversations. To quote Stephen Covey, we need to “*seek first to understand and then be understood*”. An effective listening skill is to validate your understanding of a message by employing clarifying statements such as, “*What I am hearing you say*”, or by using open-ended questions.

4. We **discern mixed or unspoken messages** by tuning into **non-verbal cues** such as anxious facial expressions, slumped posture, or shifting eye contact.

5. We extend “**ample air space**” by refraining from interrupting the other person - common sense that is not so commonly practised. An effective technique is to list one’s thoughts or questions on paper when another person is speaking. This not only inhibits rude interruptions but also helps one evaluate the importance and sincerity of their response or follow-up questions, and reminds us, “**when in doubt to leave it out**”: in other words, it is perhaps better left unsaid.

6. We practise **RASA** (Treasure, 2011), a Sanskrit word meaning “essence” that aptly serves as an acronym for active listening:

**R** - We **Receive** information without interrupting

**A** - We convey our **Appreciation** towards the speaker through at-

tentive body language

**S-** We **Summarize** the other person's key points

**A-** We **Ask** clarifying questions to check for understanding

Rachel Remen's quote from *skillsyouneed.com*, perhaps best illustrates the value in *Perfecting the Art of Active Listening*, and its importance in personal development and interpersonal relationships:

**"The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen.**

**Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention."** **PE**

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## The Winning Habit

### Lessons to be learned

 By C.V. Subramaniam

Everyone wants to win, succeed, and feel proud they could achieve something. Everyone, therefore, approaches a task with the objective of accomplishment and winning, but, many a time things and circumstances are not favorable to us and though one approaches the problem in the right spirit, things just don't happen - happen the way we expect. Here are some lessons to be learned from such happenings.

#### Three important tips

I am borrowing the tips from Paulo Coelho to explain this situation. He says in his book *Manuscript found in Accra*, the following:

Wait patiently for the right moment to act

Don't let the next opportunity slip by you

Take pride in your scars.

#### Patience

When things don't favor us, the best thing is to keep cool and adopt a patient attitude. One must get comfort from the fact that it is not his fault, try as one did. When soldiers find that their gun shots are not hitting the target, what do they do? They don't retreat, they don't feel dejected, they don't feel defeated. They only think that this time it was a miss. Trained as they are to fight, they feel: 'does this prevent us in making more attempts?' Definitely not. On the contrary, they try to aim better and repeat the act, with more confidence. It may just happen that this time also the shot does not hit the target. Never mind, he must be feeling that the advantage is not in his favor. All he has to do is to wait for the right moment to strike. And if one works with such patience the right moment will just come. And, they score a victory.

#### Grab the next opportunity

In order to succeed, the next opportunity should not, therefore be allowed to slip by. One has to be more concerned, more con-

scious to make use of the next opportunity and, may be approach the problem in a different way. For, opportunities will arise whether you want or not.

#### Take pride in your scars

The failures often appear as scars. But rather than getting disappointed and defeated, the experience of the failed attempts make one ponder over a new plan, or a totally different strategy. Thus, rather than feeling bad, one should be able to take pride in the scars. Then, the very scars may turn out to be medals. If you treat the scars left by failures as medals, you get the courage to nullify the effect of such scars. Talking of scars, there is a mention in the '*Naarayaneeyam*' (treatise on Lord Krishna) that Sage Bhrgu kicked in the chest of Lord Krishna, who said 'let this be an *alankaram* (decoration) for my chest forever', and thus Krishna's chest shows a scar known as '*sreevalsam*'.

To quote Paulo Coelho again,

**"the day will come when Fate knocks on our door. It might be the gentle tapping of the Angel of Good Fortune or the unmistakable rat-a-tat of the Unwanted Visitor" which must be welcomed.**

The above lessons should almost certainly make you stronger to fight with fresh energy and enthusiasm and WIN. And, you have finally learnt to make a winning habit. **PE**



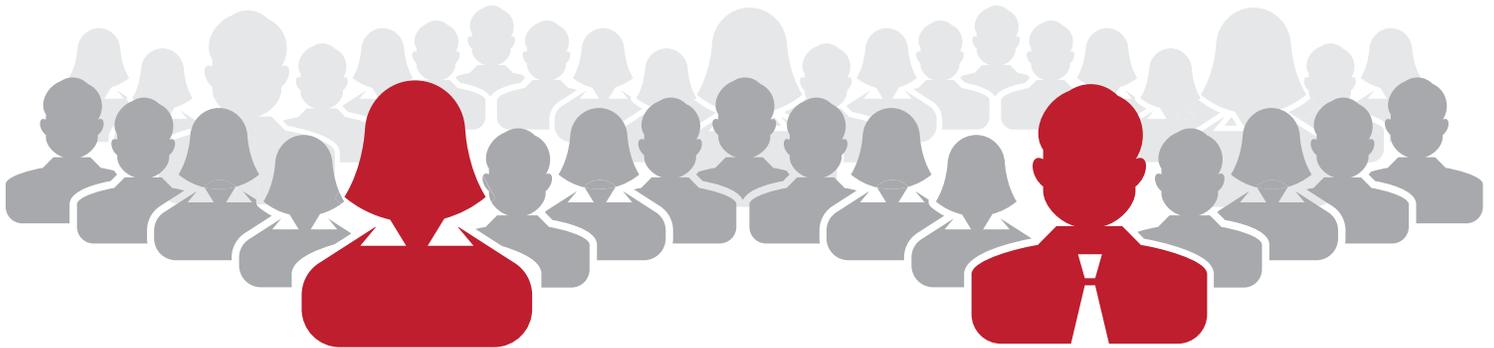
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# Is a Smile Really Contagious?

Know the true index of success

 By Matteo Rizzato



**I**n a 2012 interview, Prof. Giacomo Rizzolatti, one of the world's leading neuroscientists, explained how feelings are “contagious.”

“I’m always delighted when science confirms intuitions, especially when scientific discoveries help us bring about important changes in everyday behavior.”

This is the case described in this interview, especially when the professor speaks of love and feelings, in particular, the example of the *power* of the simple smile.

*“The response to a question asked politely and with a smile is completely different from the same question asked abruptly. A smile passes from one person to another, like laughter. Some comedians make you laugh just through the way they laugh. A yawn affects not only those who see it, but also those who hear a story in which a yawn is mentioned.”*

Please note, we are not talking about the classic “false smile”: for our smile to be truly contagious, it must be honest, come from within and from balanced and serene state of mind. People immediately recognize a fake smile!

Moods are clearly recognized by others thanks to mirror neurons, which I will explain later.

Continuing the interview, the professor says something very true about business:

“

**Unfortunately, bosses don’t realize that having an empathetic relationship with others will make them work better. Instead they believe they get better results through fear, creating the opposite effect.”**

Have you known people who use fear or sadness as tools of persuasion? Has this made you live well?

We can confidently say that good relationships are essential in business, increasing productivity.

Science can contribute many ideas on the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Companies can have many forms of poor communication: think of a Director General who does not get along with the CEO, or simply colleagues who cannot communicate and therefore collaborate as little as possible. How much does this cost the company each year in productivity?

In the near future, the market will reward those who have learned to smile sincerely and through their state of mind, spread a balanced, calm and communicative atmosphere, increasing productivity and the quality of service offered. Not to mention improving

interpersonal relationships and therefore the quality of life.

The companies I advise are initially skeptical that these changes can improve sales or productivity. When they realize that the atmosphere has changed, they understand and begin to list the things that have changed and how they are “living better”, even if they are at work. And how they take this atmosphere home in the evening. How much is that worth? How many of us would like to work in a calm environment where eight hours feel like four? How important is it to go home and have a positive state of mind towards your partner? Can we list what we lose every time we leave the office, or home, with expressions of sadness, anxiety, anguish and stress? We only have one life.

### **Mirror neurons and empathy: new frontiers in corporate and staff training.**

When we see someone perform an action, if it is one we have performed ourselves and know, mirror neurons are activated in our brain, and this allows us to understand the action at a deep level. Imagine seeing someone stub a toe... how do you feel? Do you understand how much it hurts? If it has happened to you, yes: you know because your mirror neurons are activated, “mirroring” that action.

This also explains why when we see someone yawn, for example, we immediately imitate the gesture, even **involuntarily**.

We are able to do this because we were *activated towards* the observed action by our *mirror system*.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Adam Smith said:

*“If... I see a stroke aimed, and just ready to fall upon the leg, or arm, of another person, I naturally shrink and draw back my own leg, or my own arm: and when it does fall, I feel it in some measure, and am hurt by it as well as the sufferer.”*

This is a wonderful demonstration of empathic resonance, by which people understand the emotions of others through their ability to mirror each other. When you watch television or a movie, immersed in the images, you feel sensations that seem to catapult you “inside” the drama.

Charles Darwin stated in 1870:

*“When a public singer suddenly becomes a little hoarse, many of those present may be heard, as I have been assured by a gentleman on whom I can rely, to clear their throats; ... I have also been told that at leaping matches ... many of the spectators... move their feet.”*

We can reproduce the observed act because from the moment we see it, the same movement is *present* within us (it is part of our **motor vocabulary** because we have done it, know it). Seeing others do it, it is **as if** we were doing it, with one difference: inside us the gesture is only *potential*. It is our subsequent intention that may transform it into an actual one.

This became of greater import when it was discovered that mirror neurons also act on *emotions*. Inside us we have a mirror system capable of uniting the image we see of others (faces and expressions) to emotions they are feeling, making us experience, if only in part, the feelings we are observing, particularly if the emotions are negative.

Think of anger or a smile. Initially, watching someone feel certain emotions we are immediately inclined to “prepare ourselves” to feel them. It is then our choice whether to imitate them or not. Meanwhile, we have somehow *lived* them!

Just as we tend to imitate a yawn and to understand others’ motor

intentions, we are also prone to “copy” their moods.

The point is that most people are not aware of this; in fact there are people who keep their negative attitude a lifetime! Think of aggressive people, of “chronic” pessimists. How do you feel when you meet them?

On the other hand how nice it is to be with positive people, because **balance, joy and serenity** are “infectious”. The **smile!**

When we are with others, our space becomes shared and through this extraordinary mechanism of the brain, others immediately recognize our actions and emotions. This **unites** us profoundly, demonstrating, scientifically, that we cannot help experiencing what those around us experience.

In short, living in contact with others exposes us to a marvelous collective phenomenon whereby we “infect” each other. To get closer to someone, you should first examine your emotional state: *we can improve others’ moods through modifying our own!*

The more advanced companies have already figured out how this impacts the business climate and are training their employees, especially their managers! One negative or stressed employee can infect the mood of a whole company.

Have you ever walked into a store and found rude salespeople who are obviously sick of working in an unfulfilling, unsatisfying context?

Are the owners aware that by slightly improved their employees’ conditions and valuing them, they might smile and attract more customers?

The salesperson, receptionist, cashier and the front office are the company’s calling card.

We often choose one store over another for the quality of the salespeople. This applies to supermarkets, waiters in restaurants (never scrimp on waiters!), as well as bar staff.

And by quality I mean what’s **inside** them, regardless of their CV.

How many clients can a supermarket with thousands of customers lose because of demotivated people at the checkout? Do the math, especially on how much they could earn by investing in training to improve staff morale.

The difference is the staff’s state of mind, because their mood will “infect” all who come into contact with them.

Think about the implications of this mechanism at the level of interpersonal relationships. How has it affected your upbringing? Do we learn things better when taught by an angry parent or a calm one?

In the book ***I Am Your Mirror: Mirror Neurons and Empathy***, Davide Donelli and I explain the wonder of these mechanisms as clearly as possible so that everyone can master this discovery and improve their interpersonal relationships. We want people to be better and happier at work, home, and in all interpersonal relationships. We are convinced that *getting on well with others and making others feel good is the true index of success.* **PE**



Matteo Rizzato is the co-author of ***I Am Your Mirror: Mirror Neurons and Empathy***. A professional coach, certified in Neuro Linguistic Programming New Code, he has a degree in political science. After working in sectors ranging from banking to public institutions, he specialized in communication. In 2006, he furthered his studies into mirror neurons and empathy. Visit [matteorizzato.wordpress.com](http://matteorizzato.wordpress.com)

# Building Self-Confidence

## 5 ways to project confidence

 By Carol Kinsey Goman



**I**’ve been studying confidence (especially as it relates to the ability to deal optimally with change) for the past twenty-five years. Confidence is the personality trait most responsible for an individual’s ability to deal well with organizational transitions. Confident people are self-motivated, have high self-esteem, and are willing to take calculated risks. Here are five ways to build your self-confidence:

### 1. Play to your strengths

I once gave a speech for the senior management team of a software company in Silicon Valley that was relocating out of state. A few days later, the president of the company telephoned me to say, “I have an administrative assistant who is probably the brightest, most creative person I’ve worked with. The problem is, she’s married and can’t move her family. I was wondering if you would see her for a private coaching session, so that when she applies for a new job, she will come across just as terrific as she really is. I’ll gladly pay for the session.”

Of course, I agreed, and looked forward to meeting this talented woman. When she came into my office I said, “This is a real pleasure. I’ve heard so many terrific things about you. Tell me about yourself. What is it that you do exceptionally well? What would you most want a prospective employer to know about you?” The woman was silent for several seconds. Finally she sighed and said, “I really don’t know. I do a lot of things well, but when I do them, I don’t notice.”

Competence, strangely enough, bears little relationship to con-

fidence. The fact that you do your job extremely well does not, by itself, insure that you are also confident of your abilities. It is only when you are aware of your competence that you become confident.

My favorite tip for increasing awareness of your strengths and talents is especially effective right before a job interview or any other important event in which you want to project your most confident self. First, think of a past success that filled you with pride and a high sense of achievement. (This doesn’t have to be taken from your professional life – although I do encourage clients to keep a “success log” so that they can easily find an event.) Then recall the feeling of power and certainty – and remember or imagine how you looked and sounded. Recalling that genuine emotion will help you embody it as you enter the meeting room or walk up to the podium.

### 2. Watch your posture

You know that the way you feel affects your body. If you are feeling insecure or depressed, you tend to round your shoulders, slump, and look down. If you are upbeat and assured you tend to hold yourself erect and expand your chest. But did you know that the reverse is also true? Your posture has a powerful impact on your emotions and on the way that others perceive you.

Research at Harvard and Columbia Business Schools, shows that simply holding your body in expansive, “high-power” poses for as little as two minutes stimulates higher levels of testosterone - the hormone

linked to power and dominance - and lower levels of cortisol, one of the stress hormones.

In addition to causing hormonal shifts in both males and females, the researchers found that these powerful postures lead to increased feelings of power and a higher tolerance for risk. They also found that people are more often influenced by how they feel about you than by what you're saying.

So before you go into a situation in which you want to project your most confident self, start by standing up straight, pulling your shoulders back, widening your stance and holding your head high. Then put your hands on your hips (think "Wonder Woman" or "Superman" pose). Just by holding your body in this posture you will begin to feel surer of yourself and to project self-assuredness.

### 3. Choose to be an optimist

In Chinese, the ideogram for crisis combines two characters: One is the symbol for danger, the other for opportunity. So -- is the glass half-empty or half-full? It's both. The only difference is where you focus your attention.

Long before Dale Carnegie, the human potential movement, or self-help videos, a positive outlook was acknowledged to be a crucial part of high-level achievement and confidence. In today's fast-moving, competitive business environment, a positive, upbeat, "can-do" attitude is vital for success.

Choosing not to dwell on negativity, doesn't mean you should be oblivious to potential danger. Rather, you can analyze situations for both positive and negative aspects, develop strategies to minimize negatives and optimize positives, and then focus on the upside of the situation. Spending too much time worrying about troublesome aspects or negative outcomes is a waste of mental energy that saps enthusiasm and confidence and makes it more difficult to realize the potential opportunities that are also inherent in the situation.

### 4. Loosen up

At another program, for a utility company on the East Coast, I was asked to speak twice: once in the morning and again in the afternoon. At the first session I had just finished talking about the growing uncertainty that all organizations face when an audience member asked, "If everything is uncertain, what happens to strategic planning? How can you make any plans for an unknown future?"

It was a good question, and I answered it by using the two sessions as an example:

"I was hired to put on two identical programs today, but you and I both know that it is impossible for them to be identical even though I will use the same set of Power Point slides for both presentations. The differences will be determined by the makeup of the two audiences -- how many attend, what their energy level is, what questions they ask, maybe even what they had for lunch. And, of course, I too will be slightly different depending on my energy level and what I had for lunch, etc. I don't know how the afternoon session will be different, but I'm certain that the unexpected will happen.

As you prepare for the future, you need to set goals and make plans while taking into account a multitude of contingencies in a volatile environment. And then you have to understand that, despite your best efforts, the future may not play out the way you planned, and you will most probably be required to reorient as conditions change -- frequently in ways you never anticipated."

Some people are naturally more flexible and better at coping with and adapting to a complex, always changing reality than others. (I call these in-

dividuals "change adept.") They've learned that, in chaotic times, the trick is not to brace for change, but to loosen up and learn how to roll with it.

You can build resilience and confidence by honing your ability to commit to a course of action while, at the same time, staying flexible enough to alter behaviors and attitudes quickly to support a new direction.

### 5. Embrace failure

In a television interview, Whoopie Goldberg described how she got her first one-woman show in New York: Whoopie was performing her nightclub act and (the director) Mike Nichols was in the audience. He came backstage and offered to create a show for her in a Broadway theater. Whoopie said she didn't know if that was such a good idea. What if she were lousy? Mike asked if she'd ever been lousy before and Whoopie said "Sure!" His response was, "Then it's no big deal. You'll just be lousy on Broadway."

To me, that reply was brilliant.

I urge my audiences to appreciate that growth comes as much from failure as it does from success. One project manager I interviewed summed it up when he said, "If this venture fails, it will still be worth all the time and effort I've put into it for the past 18 months. Just look at everything I've learned."

To facilitate this kind of productive thinking, the United States Army developed the After Action Reviews. AARs are now used by organizations around the world to help teams learn from their mistakes, prevent future errors, and find new solutions to problems.

Basically, the AAR process assembles people who were involved in a planned project and asks them to answer a series of questions. But you can conduct your own private AAR around any important event that didn't turn out the way you hoped it would.

1. What was the desired outcome?
2. What was the actual outcome?
3. Why were there differences between what I wanted and what I achieved?
4. What did I learn?
5. What would I do differently next time?

Fear of failure is a huge obstacle to developing and projecting self-confidence. But when you know that your failures can't stop you (if they are learning experiences and "no big deal"), then you increase your confidence that nothing can stop you! **PE**



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# 7 Ways to Boost Your EQ

## Putting emotional intelligence to work

 By Casey Mulqueen

**W**hile emotional intelligence addresses how we perceive and understand our own emotions and the emotions of others, Behavior EQ is the evolution of that awareness; it is our ability to use EQ to manage personal behavior and relationships. BEQ skills are objective, measurable benefits associated with increased sales, better recruiting, effective leadership and customer service.

The good news is that BEQ skills can be learned, and in fact, by focusing first on BEQ, our EQ will subsequently increase as a result. Below are some actionable items you can do to immediately improve your interactions at work (your BEQ).

### 1. Control your behavior by understanding your emotions

Learn and understand your emotional triggers -- the things that result in losing behavioral control.

This is invaluable for understanding the situations and emotions that you experience just prior to losing control of your behavior. Understanding emotions is important for learning how to manage your behavior.

### 2. Mentally rehearse common situations that set off your emotional triggers

Research shows that when you mentally rehearse scenarios, you are activating the same neural circuitry that is activated when you are actually in the scenario. Instead of responding the way you typically have in the past, imagine yourself acting in a more productive way. Develop a mental “movie” of yourself and clearly imagine yourself behaving in the ways you want. This will help prepare you for when these situations actually occur. You will have a script to follow.

### 3. Force your brain into action by solving a problem

Actively distracting yourself is an effective way to maintain self-control. If you are suddenly in a situation where you are feeling anger or frustration, for instance, shift your focus from the other person or situation to a mental problem. Make the problem challenging. For example, work out the solution to 15 x 18. This will force your brain to focus on the math problem and away from the stressful situation. The old adage that you should count to ten is not effective. The reason is that it is too easy and, therefore, does not actively engage the brain. Distracting yourself with a difficult problem is an effective strategy for avoiding an emotional reaction. It is not important to solve the problem correctly.

The point is to engage the brain region that solves problems, thereby preventing the emotional center of your brain from flooding the bloodstream with adrenalin and other stress hormones that cause strong emotional reactions.

### 4. Engage in healthy escapism

If it is too hard to find a mental problem to solve, another form of distraction is to actively let your attention shift to a pleasant memory. You can sing a song in your mind, think of your favorite place or activity, a funny TV show, whatever works best for you. Similar to solving a problem, this will engage your mind and prevent the amygdala from taking control and causing a strong emotional reaction. Think of this as a healthy form of mental escapism.

### 5. When it comes to email, the “send” button is not your friend

Ask a friend or trusted colleague to review questionable emails

before you send them. Research shows that as many as one-half of all emails are misinterpreted by the recipient. If you think something sounds neutral, it might be interpreted as offensive or rude. Carefully consider your message and the recipients. What type of people are they? What are their behavioral styles? How are they likely to interpret your email? In what ways could your message be misinterpreted? Just as important, if you are feeling angry or frustrated when writing the email, this is a red flag. It is too easy to hit the “send” button, so develop a habit to always wait at least 30 minutes before sending an email when you are feeling emotional.

### 6. Walk away from tense situations

If you are in an emotionally heated conversation or situation, say, “I need time to think about this before I respond,” or some other appropriate response that allows you to leave the situation. Not everything has to be dealt with immediately, especially if tempers are high. Separate yourself from the situation. Allow adequate time to pass so you, and the other person, can calm down. When feeling more controlled, you can then respond to the person. Remember that in these situations the amygdala is in control of your mind. It takes time to calm down and for your prefrontal cortex to resume control of your thoughts and actions. Leaving the situation is not escapism; it is a healthy and productive action that will result in a better outcome.

### 7. Make a conscious decision to speak clearly and with decorum whenever you are in an emotionally charged situation

This is an effective strategy for avoiding the urge to blow up and lose control. Think of the language you will use; make sure it is respectful and calmly delivered. Like all habits, practice will enhance your effectiveness and it will become more natural over time. If you know that you will be in an emotional discussion, rehearse ahead of time. Determine exactly what you will say and the language you will use.

*These tips are excerpted from TRACOM’s white paper, “Behavioral EQ: Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work.” The TRACOM Group is a workplace performance company that works with the world’s top companies through leadership and team development, employee engagement and sales effectiveness training. TRACOM is best known for development of the world-famous SOCIAL STYLE Model™, a proven model for building interpersonal and selling skills. PE*



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# Talent Won't Win the War

*But these 5 surprising skills just might*

By David Sturt and Todd Nordstrom

They're calling it a "war." Apparently, it's do or die time for organizations to protect and stockpile talent—to keep and hire the "A Players" of the world, the rock stars and the champions, or be out-maneuvered by those who do.

For years now, even during the greatest slump of the recession, the so-called "War on Talent" has been a hot topic. It suggests that, in the end, there will be winners and losers; that there is a limited supply of talented individuals, and that as soon as winning organizations find all the people with super-traits and hire them, there will be a slim chance for organizations with people of average talent to succeed



The largest-ever study of award-winning work revealed a slightly more hopeful thought: Talent is not always the greatest predictor of success.

The word talent refers to those *natural* gifts or traits that make people who they are. And, as much as we believe talent can drive innovation and great work, a group of us at the O.C. Tanner Institute were also curious to know: "Which is the bigger driver of great work: the level of talent people possess, or what they actually *do*?"

After evaluating data from 1.7 million instances of award-winning work, conducting in-depth interviews with hundreds of actual difference makers and analyzing all the pieces to see how they fit together, we discovered some findings that may surprise you.

The vast majority award-winning work we studied involved a cross-section of the workforce—janitors, front line retailers, administrative personnel, health care workers and service providers in various sectors.

Our research clearly revealed that the things people *do* (skills that can be learned) were far better predictors of success than who people *are* (their character traits, abilities, and talents).

To start, we wanted to measure how standard variables used in management science would predict success. Age, gender, tenure and company size, became the variables in our control group and these variables rarely predicted measurable areas of success at all. They had zero impact on predicting whether a person's work would have lasting success and very little impact on predicting whether a person's success would exceed expectations or create extraordinary quality.

Next, we tested many traits that are commonly believed to be predictors of success like a person's sense of meaning, calling and security (stability). We also tested other popular predictors of success, such as proactive personality, intrinsic interest and desire to help others. Recruiters have long sought out these personality traits because they are, in fact, correlated with success. If we could pinpoint all the above traits in a person, we could increase chances of success (where results exceeded expectations) by an average of 16 percent. That's pretty impressive.

## But that's exactly where "The War on Talent" gets interesting

Throughout the process of collecting and analyzing data, and our one-on-one interviews with people who had created award-winning work, we noticed five skills (activities people performed in the process of creating great work) that showed up with surprising consistency. We labeled the skills as Ask The Right Question, See for Yourself, Talk to your Outer Circle, Improve the Mix and Deliver The Difference. Naturally, we had a hunch that these skills would improve the probability of success—perhaps at least as much as talents and character traits. However, when put into practice together, the five skills increase the chances of exceeding expectations by nearly 36 percent—20 percentage points more than all of the personality traits we tested combined.

## What does all this mean?

Although natural talents and personality traits significantly increase the odds of success, our research shows that great work is more probable when people use a simple set of learnable (and yes, trainable) skills. Basically, *what people do is more important than who they are*.

So what are the organizational implications of these findings? It means that we need to balance our efforts of finding the people with super traits, with ensuring that our people (who may or may not be the "A Players" and rock stars) practice a simple set of skills for success:

### 1. Ask the Right Question

How often do we pause, before we do our work, to ask if we can do something better? Great work begins when we take the time to ask ourselves the right question: is there some way to make a difference that people would love? Award winners follow their curiosity to find new and better ways to do things.

### 2. See for Yourself

People who produce award-winning work don't just work from their desks. They get out and look for possibilities with their own two eyes. They observe processes, customer-product interactions, trends and related disciplines to fill their minds with difference-making ideas.

### 3. Talk to Your Outer Circle

Conversations with people we don't usually talk to about our work lead to ideas we wouldn't think of on our own. That's why conversations with others are indispensable idea-generating tools. They get us unstuck, cause new connections to fire in our brains and help us discover new possibilities.

### 4. Improve the Mix

People find improvements worth making by adding valuable new elements, and removing less-valued elements from their "mix" until everything seems to fit. Difference-makers don't just add the first idea that comes along. They play with ideas mentally to discover which combination has the potential to create the biggest difference. Then they make it.

### 5. Deliver the Difference

Finally, people who do award-winning work are obsessed with positive outcomes. Their work isn't over until people love the result. That means the definition of job completion shifts from "my work is finished" to "I made a difference." And that takes learning, adaptation

and seeing our work through until a difference is made.

Practiced together, these five skills for great work are a better predictor of success than all the personality traits we tested combined. Maybe the "War on Talent" has been a tough battle simply because we're looking at only a subset of the factors that drive success—wondering how to attract rock stars to our team, without considering that they may be sitting in the cubicle next door. **PE**



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## Journey to Excellence

*It is exciting, inspiring and fun*

 By Christine Chen

**“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”** **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

I absolutely love this quote by Dr. King. Every time I read it, I can clearly hear this great man's booming voice filled with passion as he inspires all to excel at every task, no matter the size.

One of my favorite workshops to teach, "Journey to Excellence," is all about providing world-class customer and client service. It's a noisy business environment. Today's customers have unlimited options to choose from. How will you be heard? How do you keep your customers and clients coming back? These are important questions to ask and to focus on regularly.

Here's the reality. Customers today are different than those of years past. They are savvy, smart, and have no time for poor service. And, yes, we all are serving someone. Whether we sit in the back office, wait tables, own a small business, teach students, or run a multi-billion dollar enterprise, we all are judged in lightning speed whether or not we are worthy of our customer's money, time, and loyalty.

It's been proven that providing stellar service brings big rewards. However, this fact seems to be a secret to most. There's a service crisis in our country. A whopping 41% of Americans believe they receive below average service and only 3% say they receive world-class service

Along with the obvious rewards of delivering exceptional service such as loyal customers and financial gain, there's a greater reward to doing your best. Self-worth. Respect. Pursuit of excellence. A job well done.

Most of us are at our jobs most of our waking hours. We can choose to drag ourselves to work with a rotten attitude that affects

us and all those around us. We may loathe our jobs, our colleagues, our boss, or our customers. Doing the bare minimum to get through the day seems to be the goal for most. However, it really doesn't have to be this way.

What if we made a choice to change how we face each day? What if we decided to make a difference? What if we faced each day with an attitude of excellence? Pursuing excellence and doing a job to the best of our ability not only creates a positive environment but can be exciting. Think about it. Each day could actually be thrilling with these thoughts in mind:

- How am I going to WOW someone **today**?
- Where can I go above and beyond in my job **today**?
- What can I change about my job to make it better **today**?
- Who will I help **today**?
- Will I be an answer to someone's need **today**?

Mediocrity is boring. Just getting through the day is depressing. Complaining about circumstances is discouraging. Make a change. Start a new journey. Take the step toward being the best **today**. The journey to excellence is exciting, inspiring, and fun. At the end of the journey, Dr. King's words, "Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well," are what truly matter. **PE**

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## Leaving you out of touch and vulnerable?

 By James O. Rodgers

 Managing Differently



**D**onald Sterling, owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, has become a headline for all the wrong reasons. A recording of Sterling making racist comments to his girlfriend was leaked to the public, causing NBA commissioner Adam Silver to ban Sterling from the league for life and slap him with a \$2.5 million fine. The NBA may also force Sterling to sell his team. The man has disgraced himself in the public eye.

Sterling's story isn't unique: We hear all the time about people losing their jobs and destroying their reputations because they used racial, sexual, or homophobic slurs. Remember the backlash that actor Michael Richards faced when he used a racial slur during a comedy act? Or that PR executive Justine Sacco lost her job after her insensitive tweet went viral?

We wonder how these things could happen, but the reality is that they can happen easily when we don't surround ourselves with diverse inner circles.

### What is Inner-Circle Talk?

Everyone wants to appear diversity-friendly and diversity mature when in public. [In private, however, most of us surround ourselves with people who look, act, and think like we do. Our inner circles are not very diverse.](#)

When we spend time with our inner circles, we engage in "inner-circle talk." We have these private conversations away from the world where we can talk about whatever we want. That means we can make derogatory comments about "others" with impunity. We get a good laugh, and no harm is done. The members of our inner circle are just like us, so they'll agree with whatever we say.

But look at what happened to Sterling. He thought he was having a private conversation. But his inner-circle talk became public, and when it did, it ruined his reputation. The world is full of people who are not part of your inner circle. These people are different from you,

and they won't hesitate to cry out against you if your inner-circle talk is harmful or insensitive.

### Challenging Yourself with Diversity

The motivational speaker Jim Rohn said that we are the average of the five people we spend the most time with. So think about it: if the inner circle – the people you spend the most time with – is made up of people just like you, you are not going to grow or change. Your beliefs will stagnate, even as the world around you changes.

[Now, if you cultivate a diverse inner circle, you bring fresh perspectives into your life.](#) Suddenly, your inner circle isn't agreeing on everything. People will challenge what you say. They'll challenge what you think. And that's a good thing, because it helps you grow. It forces you to stop and take stock of what you think and say. It also puts you in a place to consider new ideas you may have never heard before.

If Sterling had kept a diverse inner circle, he would have learned long ago that his beliefs were outdated and his speech was inappropriate. But he didn't, and look what happened.

There is a trap here. You may be tempted to spend all your time condemning Sterling and not looking at your own situation. We are all subject to exposure because our brain may go on automatic pilot when we least expect it. Think about it - what language do you use in your inner circle that would embarrass you or cause harm to others if it went public? Spend time purging yourself of that language by expanding your inner circle. That's a better use of your time and effort. **PE**



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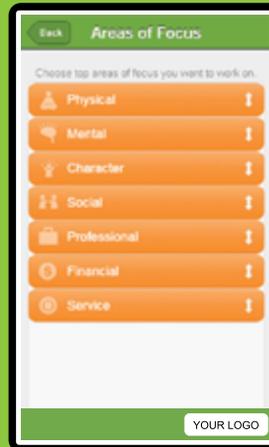
The **Personal Excellence App** for Personal Development does this daily: builds alignment, skills, motivation, and much more within your organization. In your brand, you will be able to align content and learning objects to the key values and objects you have set for your organization. Map content and exercises to your employees that help your organization achieve its goals while developing all your leaders. In addition, you will be able to imbed custom training and content and messages that can reach your employees daily, motivating and inspiring them each and every day.

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Employees choose the areas of focus they want to work on

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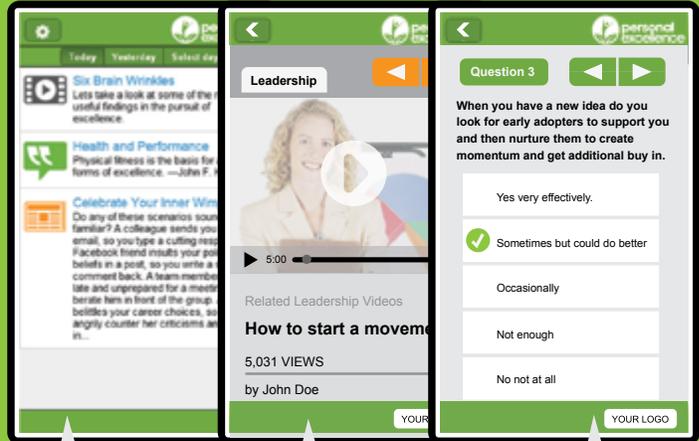
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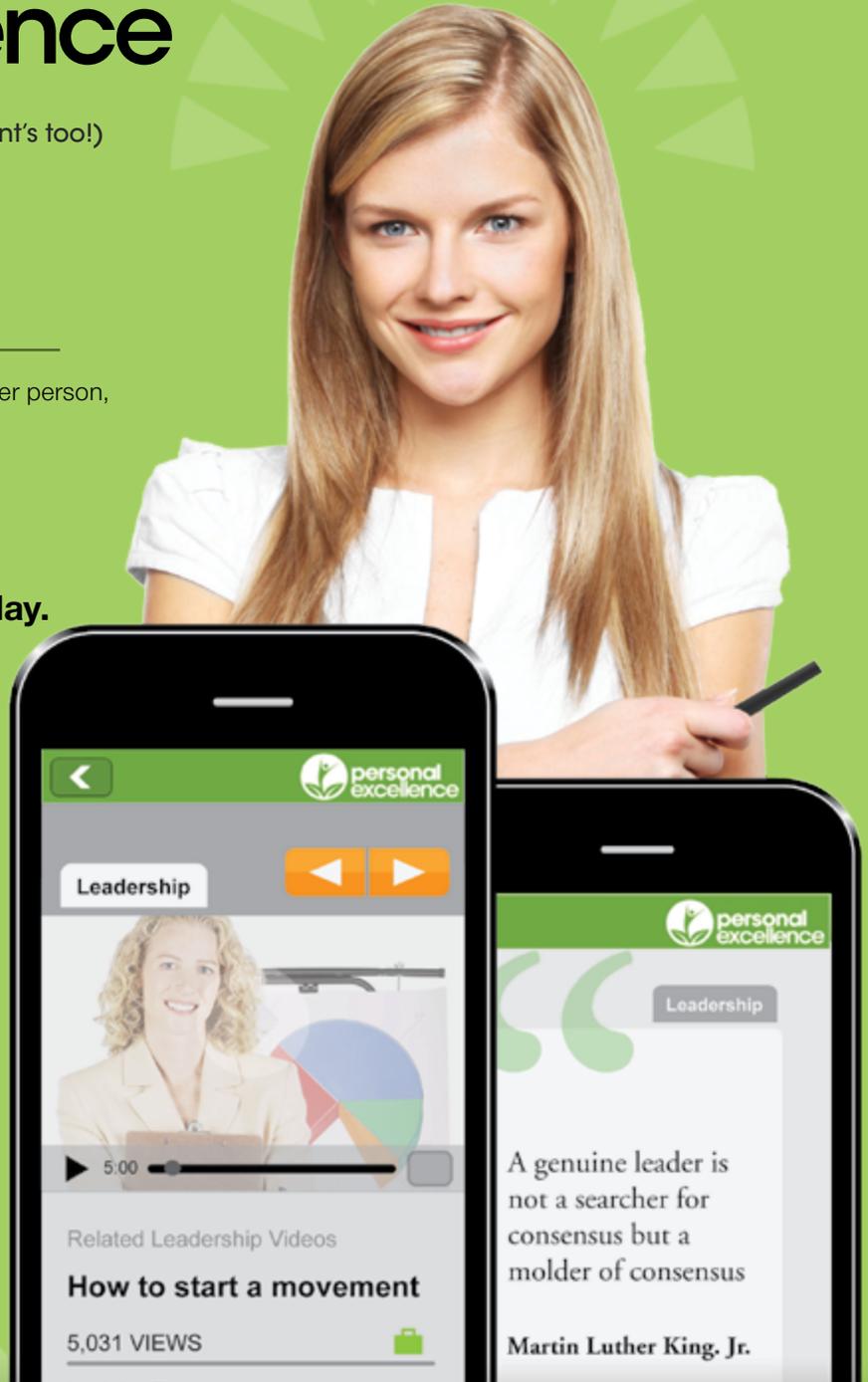
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# Bringing Your A-Game

## *A guide for high potentials*

 By Bonnie Hagemann & Sandra Stroope

**C**ompetition is hot and leadership is needed. High potentials who want to make it to the “suite seats” are expected to deliver results, be inspiring leaders, think critically, be flexible, innovative, collaborative AND be able to lead influentially. It’s no small task. In fact, in order to make it, high potentials must bring their “A-Game” every day. They no longer have the luxury of a bad day, week, month, or quarter. They have to get up every day and bring their very best to the table.

As developers of leaders, we see executives and high potentials every day. Some make it. Many don’t. Why? Well, there are many reasons but we often see leaders run into challenging situations and begin a downward spiral that ultimately caused them to derail. As a high potential, challenging situations are exactly what their bosses and we, as developers of leaders, give them. We give them stretch assignments, new territories, stretch goals, more bandwidth, more staff to manage, hot political situations, and the toughest customer negotiations. Many times we send high potentials into uncharted territories and new experiences that call for learning new skills as well as the adaptability to apply the skills they already have in brand new situations. And what do we expect back from these high performers? We expect nothing less than superior performance and business outcomes.

When developed appropriately, high potentials will have the support of good mentors, an executive coach, development courses, continuous feedback and an environment conducive to meet expectations and perform. Too often though, we find that high potentials are not developed appropriately. Instead they are given all of the increased responsibility and none of the support needed to grow into the expanded role. According to a study by the Vaya Group, 40% of high potential job moves end in failure and up to 64% of high potentials say that developmental assignments are having little impact on their development.

So who is responsible for appropriate development? It’s a combination. The success of high potentials falls on the shoulders of their manager, senior leaders in the organization, the development staff, their mentor, their coach and ultimately the high potential. There are many reasons that high potentials fail to grow to the next level and most are correctable with focused attention. One thing is sure - getting to the top of organizations today is not for the weak, weary or easily discouraged. It requires a strong heart and extreme resilience. The high potential must have the ability to get up every day and give it everything and that includes creating enough rest, family time and balance to stay sharp, engaged and effective.

In a recent coaching engagement, our coach kept getting feedback that the high potential was “venting” to anyone and everyone about the slow pace and bureaucratic labyrinth in the 100+ year old organization where he served. He didn’t stop there, he was furious with his Vice President (2 levels above him) for his seemingly poor decisions to move out the high potential’s boss and had told the VP that he didn’t agree and didn’t want to work in his division. The coach sat the high potential down and let him know that while what he was saying may be true, the venting wasn’t helping anyone. In fact, if he weren’t such a star performer, his venting would have already cost

him either his job with the company or at least his current position as a high potential and in fact, his status was in jeopardy. He had one chance to redeem himself, and he better get it right. The exceptionally smart and fit engineer in his early 40s looked a little shell shocked and stated emphatically that he was right. “It doesn’t matter,” said his coach. “Do you want to make it to VP or not?” “Yes.” He answered. “Then you have 6-months working with me to fix it and here is how I recommend that you start:”

1. You will start bringing your “A-Game” to work every day. You will not allow yourself the luxury of letting your guard down or acting in a way unbecoming of a senior leader.

2. You will immediately stop venting to anyone at work – ever. If you don’t have a solution that you can implement, keep your mouth shut or ask for permission to work on the problem.

3. You will go to your Vice President and apologize for your hasty and emotional reaction. Ask if you can try again. If the answer is no, then say you understand and work to regain his respect. If, hopefully, the answer is yes, you will say that you didn’t understand his decision and although you realize she probably can’t discuss this situation, you would like to learn how to make difficult decisions and how to deal with the consequences in the aftermath. Would he be willing to mentor you over a quarterly lunch meeting? Rebuilding this relationship will be crucial for his continued consideration for senior leader positions.

4. Begin acting like a leader with peers, direct reports and indirect reports. Not only will you not vent to them, you will also not allow them to vent to you. Instead, you will encourage them to think proactively and get involved in making a change in areas where they can make a difference.

5. Finally let a close friend and colleague or potentially even your current boss know that you are working on these areas and ask for help. Ask this person to point out any slips and hold you accountable for making the change.

The high potential made one more stab at defending himself. “Look, I had a great job before I came here. In my last company, everyone liked my style and I was on track to make VP.” “Wouldn’t it be easier for me just to get a job somewhere else, where I’m valued for who I am?” The coach encouraged him to look at it another way. “No one likes a complainer and what you’ve been doing is complaining.” Once you get to a certain level in an organization, it is just as important that your peers want you to succeed as it is that your boss wants you to, and it is always important that your boss and senior leaders want you to succeed. Your style of venting is a derailer. It isn’t leadership. You can fix it now or you can fix it later, but if you want to be a Vice President, you are going to have to fix it. This organization has provided you the time and the tools and the potential of a long runway as a leader here. It’s a good time to take on the challenge and learn to lead.

He got the message and jumped into making the changes that afternoon. He went to his peers and explained that he had been wrong to complain, and that he had some clean up to do. Then he went to his boss and asked for permission to request a meeting with his Vice

President in order to discuss his poor response to the decision to change his boss. His new boss agreed and the meeting was set. His vice president was gracious and not only allowed him to try again, he offered to have a once per month mentoring lunch where he would personally sponsor his development and help him both understand the business more thoroughly and learn how the difficult personnel decisions are made and how to deal with the consequences in their aftermath. The final result was that he stayed on the high potential list and was given a new stretch assignment while awaiting an opening and opportunity to move into the next level of leadership.

Asking a high potential to bring his A-Game every day, doesn't mean that he or she will never make a mistake. Many mistakes will be made and that is all a part of the learning. It also doesn't mean that he or she can never rest. In fact, rest and pacing is required. What it does mean is that the high potential no longer allows him/her to let down the guard. Think of an athlete in training who is getting ready to run an important race. There is never a day when the athlete can allow himself the mental laziness of thinking about the pain or the distance or the weather or the shoes or anything else as an obstacle that he/she cannot face and conquer. The athlete has to bring his/her A-Game every time he/she gets on the track.

Other areas where high potentials must focus on bringing their A-Game include:

#### **Building a cohesive team**

Many times high potentials are promoted from individual contributor roles into leadership positions or given the opportunity to lead project teams. The most difficult challenges often come from the interpersonal dynamics encountered when managing former peers or handling the politics of competing goals with cross functional teams. High potentials must be able to navigate these rough waters and remain calm, cool and collected. It's equally important to be able to build trust and provide air cover for direct reports. This includes remaining calm, providing clear direction and coaching when they make mistakes. The team must be organized with set expectations and the high potential will be the guiding force who manages to those expectations, follows through and rewards the team for successes.

#### **Collaboration**

High potentials must also be able to work collaboratively across the organization. Competing for success instead of collaborating can be the beginning career suicide. This type of collaboration requires extensive communication where peers are informed of where projects are, the depth of work involved, when deadlines may be missed and other relevant details. Providing good and timely information not only builds collaboration, it also builds trust.

#### **Adaptability**

In today's marketplace, adaptability is a critical skill. Any leader who expects to stay a leader must be adaptable, adjusting quickly to changing financial realities, markets, teams, and the competition. Not being willing to hear and truly consider diverse viewpoints, or failing to innovate or adjust quickly enough to new frontiers can leave high performers standing on the tracks while the rest of the train has moved on. Leaders must be able to continually renew, adapt and forge into new frontiers.

#### **Build Peer Relationships**

An often missed key to success for high potentials is learning to work well with peers. Building a trusting and collaborative relationship with peers may be the difference between succeeding and failing.

It may also be the difference in whether or not the high potential is ultimately promoted to a senior leader position. Peer relationships are also critical when it comes to gaining support or resources needed across the organization. When the resources are being divvied up, it really helps if the peers across the table want you to be successful.

#### **Critical Thinking**

Executive Development Associates conducts Trends in Executive Development research every two years and our most recent research indicates that Critical Thinking is the most lacking competency in next generation leaders. With the pace and complexity of business and the rate of change required, leaders need a heightened ability in problem-solving, decision-making, creative thinking, and strategic thinking. They need the ability to assimilate information and make high quality decisions quickly in the face of uncertainty and pressure is essential to the success of the leader. In short, they need to be prepared for just about anything, and developing strong critical thinking skills is one very important aspect of being ready.

#### **Social Skills**

Can we talk about faux pas for a minute? While it is rarely covered, social skills have been the downfall of more than one high potential. We recently heard of a CEO of a medical company who got completely drunk at the holiday party and told one of his employee's boyfriends that he doesn't know if he will be able to keep from having to do layoffs. The boyfriend discussed it with his smart, high-paid and high potential girlfriend on the way home. She spent the rest of the holiday wondering if she had a job and starting to look for another position. This was a seasoned leader who should have known better and high potentials can learn from this mistake.

Bringing your A game means remembering that you are representing the company whether you are attending a business lunch, dinner, conference or on your own personal time. Drinking too much at a company event can lead to career disaster and we've all heard of recent career derailers that were caused by controversial posts to Facebook, Linked In, or Twitter. If it wouldn't look good in the headlines of the newspaper or to your boss, don't do it and don't say it.

#### **Preparation**

Finally, high potentials can bring their A game by being prepared. Like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts teach, always be prepared, organized, and on time. High potentials must prepare themselves for success. Yes, they need to do the standard preparation for projects, meetings, etc., but we are talking about a preparation that many miss and is truly crucial to long-term success. High potentials must prepare for leaders by getting and staying fit. Leaders who are well, fit, and rested are able to make more effective decisions and handle heavier levels of stress than those who have run themselves down both mentally and physically. **PE**



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# Balancing Life and Work

## How professionals with work-life balance are different

 By Jeff Davidson

 The challenges of advancing in your career and of maintaining work-life balance become more acute with each passing month. With that in mind, here are 21 ways that professionals with work-life balance are different from others:



1) The typical person thinks that work-life balance is needed only when things get hectic. Those who have work-life balance realize that it is an everyday practice.

- Practice work-life balance techniques every day, much like taking a daily shower
- Recognize the small opportunities around you all day long
- Plan from Sunday night to next Sunday
- Maintain a mindset of not loading up on activities and not overdoing it

2) The typical person becomes stressed throughout the workday from mounting demands. Those with work-life balance anticipate unexpected demands and dispense their energy accordingly.

- Leave sufficient slack in your schedule

- Have one weekday evening per week with nothing scheduled
- Pace yourself throughout the day
- Establish a resource network of key contacts, phone numbers, email, etc.

3) The typical person suspects that only a privileged few can attain work-life balance. Those with work-life balance understand that it is within everyone's grasp.

- Read about work-life balance
- Talk about work-life balance
- Trade work-life balance ideas
- Be on the lookout

4) The typical person assumes that "money buys happiness." Those who have work-life balance know that money won't help if you're on the wrong path.

- Consider that simple solutions often work best
- Adopt a less is more approach
- Pare down
- Systemize or eliminate

5) The typical person regards taking time for themselves as a luxury they can't afford. Those who have work-life balance recognize that taking time for themselves is vital.

- Pause for ten one-minute breaks
- Go on true lunch breaks
- Take strategic pauses
- Allow for whole weekends off

6) The typical person thinks that achieving work-life balance will be fleeting; it won't last long. Those who have work-life balance take a rational, methodical approach to maintaining it.

- Recognize that upsets and overwhelm will occur
- Ask: what do I want to finish by the end of work today to feel good about the evening?
- Ask: what do I want to finish before Friday to feel good about the weekend?
- Keep creating a clearing (like Zen masters)

7) The typical person sacrifices rest and reflection in the hope of getting more done. Those with work-life balance take time for rest and reflection throughout the day, and accomplish more as a result.

- Sleep eight hours a night
- Linger after lunch
- Center yourself on the way to the restroom, water cooler, even between tasks
- Draw upon self-calming rituals all day long

8) The typical person is resigned to a state of "too much to do, not enough time to do it." Those with work-life balance establish clear priorities, support them, and assemble resources to accomplish their objectives.

- Establish life priorities and pursue them daily
- Devise goals -- quantified, reachable, and written down -- that support your priorities
- Tap unused staff skills by re-reading resumes and job applications
- Retain extra help for domestic and professional tasks via Craig-

slist, neighborhood flyers

9) The typical person multi-tasks, thinking that this is essential to get more done in less time. Those with work-life balance focus on the task at hand and accomplish more in less time.

- Avoid articles that imply multitasking is okay and even preferable
- Secure the quiet space needed to do your best work
- Master the art of doing one thing at a time
- Concentrate on the current task and take appropriate breaks

at timed intervals

10) The typical person thinks achieving work-life balance requires complex tools and sophisticated techniques. Those with work-life balance find that simple approaches work best.

- Employ a few, selected apps that are useful for you
- Place post-it pads, reminders in key locations
- Benefit in many ways from using clock timers
- Hang wall charts

11) The typical person believes that greater responsibilities diminish the chances of achieving work-life balance. Those who have it do not allow such thoughts to impede their progress.

Recognize that greater responsibility merits greater leisure investment

- Plow back some of your new found earnings
- Anticipate the challenges, and
- Strategize accordingly

12) The typical person worries that taking periodic breaks might be seen as shirking their work. Those with work-life balance regard periodic breaks as vital to their high productivity.

Rise from your seat at least every 20 minutes, which is required for good health

- Stand, walk, or stretch whenever you feel the need
- Refocus your vision with the 20-20-20 technique
- Drink water and head-off hydration problems

13) The typical person, when falling behind, wants to catch up all at once. Those with work-life balance seldom fall behind and, if they do, they avoid crash catch-up efforts.

- Practice checkbook management
- Watch your weight
- Sleep, shower, and renew
- Get help with yard work or whatever you prefer to not do

14) The typical person feels driven by external forces to race through the day. Those with work-life balance acknowledge that their own habits are the primary force in achieving WLB.

- Whip, whip who got the whip?
- Allow for sufficient commuting time
- Prepare your own lunches
- Cease blaming your boss, the mayor, etc.

15) The typical person is easily distracted by daily noise and interruptions. Those with work-life balance monitor and manage their personal space to minimize distractions.

Carry ear plugs  
Visit [www.Marpac.com](http://www.Marpac.com)  
Sound proof your workspace  
Find alternative work locations and spaces, such as a picnic table or park bench

16) The typical person focuses on finishing the workday in order to drop back and relax. Those with work-life balance are productive at work and have a life for the rest of the day after work.

- Leave work at a reasonable hour
- Reduce TV watching and web surfing
- Employ your den as a mini-gym
- Engage in invigorating leisure

17) The typical person engages in inactive leisure, i.e. watching TV, web surfing. Those with work-life balance employ leisure for novel experiences, learning, and physical activity.

- Live closer, not farther from work
- Rediscover hobbies
- Join group activities
- Peruse local event notices and attend

18) The typical person intermittently invests in his or her own well-being. Those with work-life balance strategically purchase goods and services that support their well-being.

- Buy in multiples when all supplies will eventually be used up
- Make strategic purchases
- If it saves one hour a week
- If it takes up little space, is portable, expandable, flexible, tradable

19) The typical person longs for the good old days when the pace of life was slower. Those with work-life balance recognize that even in our fast-paced society, slowing down is continually attainable.

- Acknowledge and accept the world as it is
- Seek to change aspects of your personal environment over which you have control
- Consider the 80-20 rules and ignore low-payoff tasks and activities
- Emulate the role models in your industry, organization, or profession

20) The typical person over-collects work-life balance tips hoping that such information will rub off on them. Those who have work-life balance ingest the insights of others, and ultimately follow the beat their own drum.

- Put what you learn into motion
- Adopt new behaviors until they become habits
- Establish new personal systems
- Develop rewarding rituals

21) The typical parent passes their hectic lifestyle on to their children. Those who have it teach their children what is needed to continually experience work-life balance

- Remember: children learn most from observation
- Exhibit behaviors that you want them to emulate
- Include them in activities, ask for their opinion
- Act accordingly: actions speak louder than words **PE**



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# The “Secret Sauce” of Human Motivation

## What causes people to do what they do?

 By Noah St. John



**W**hat causes people to do what they do? Your mind is like an infinite weighing machine — every moment, your mind is weighing your perceived Benefit against your perceived Cost of doing any behavior, habit or activity you can think of. Every decision you make, every habit you form, is built upon your perceived Why-To’s and Why-Not-To’s of doing that thing.

### These habits include...

- The clothes you put on this morning
- The food you ate for breakfast – and if you ate breakfast in the first place
- How many snacks you’ll eat today and exactly what you eat
- Whether you procrastinate at work
- Whether you find it hard or easy to finish projects
- Whether you are easily distracted or have no trouble concentrating

Whether I’m coaching CEOs or consulting for Fortune 500 companies, I’ve never met one human being who doesn’t want to succeed. Yet, we also know that millions of people and organizations have tried everything under the sun to become more successful, but are still not getting the results they want. So, what’s going on here?

### The Hidden Cause of Habits

According to scientific research, your conscious mind makes up less than 10% of your total brain function. That means that the subconscious or unintentional aspect of your mind represents around 90% of your total brain function.

Your subconscious is a vast collection of unintentional, habitual thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Therefore, the phrase that best describes the Subconscious mind is **NO CHOICE**.

For example, imagine that you’re sitting in your office and suddenly someone came in and turned off all the lights. Now it’s completely dark and you can’t see anything. What would happen if I then asked you to re-arrange the furniture? How successful would you be at rearranging the furniture in a room with no visible light? The answer is: not very!

Now, because you can’t rearrange the furniture in a room where you can’t see anything, does that mean you’re incapable of rearranging furniture? Of course not! You are **PERFECTLY** capable of rearranging furniture... when you can see what the heck you’re doing!

Your subconscious mind is like that dark room. It’s hidden beneath the surface, like the bottom 90% of an iceberg. And when you can’t SEE something, it’s awfully hard to change it! **Every human being wants to succeed on the conscious level**. But, because your **Why-Not-To’s of Success** are hidden in your subconscious mind, it’s like you’re driving down the road of life...with one foot on the brake.

For example, let’s say you want to drive from New York to Los Angeles. And let’s say you’ve got a nice, reliable car to get you where you want to go. So you start down the highway towards your destination. You’re thinking positive, you’re motivated, and you can’t wait to get there. So you press down really hard on the GAS pedal. But unbeknownst to you, at the same time as you have one foot on the gas, you’ve developed the unconscious habit of driving with your other foot on the BRAKE.

So here you are driving down the highway of life, trying to reach

your goal... but you’ve developed the habit of driving with one foot on the BRAKE. How long do you think it’s going to take you to reach your destination? EXACTLY. A loooooong, long time.

Now, because it’s taking you much longer than you thought it would to reach your destination, you start to search for a way to get there faster with less effort. So you find someone who says they know how to get there, and they say to you: “You know what you need? You should get a more expensive type of GASOLINE! That’s your problem!” So you pull into the gas station and fill your tank with the most expensive, high-octane gasoline you can find, and get back on the highway of life. But, guess what? Because you didn’t change your habit of driving with one foot on the BRAKE, you’re still not making much progress.

So someone else comes up to you and says: “You know what you need? You should get a new set of TIRES! Try these REALLY EXPENSIVE tires, that’s your problem!” So you go to the service station, spend MORE money buying the most expensive tires you can find, and get back on the highway. But, you’ve still got the same habit of having one foot on the BRAKE... so you’re still not reaching your destination.

Finally, someone says to you, “You know what you need? You should get a new CAR! This car you’re driving isn’t good enough. You should get a REALLY EXPENSIVE sports car, that’s your problem!” So you trade in your nice, reliable car, spend MORE money buying an expensive sports car, and get back on the highway of life.

But, even after ALL this time, money and effort, because no one took the time to show you the REAL problem – which is simply the fact that you have developed the habit of driving with one foot on the brake – you end up NOT reaching your goals... and perhaps even giving up on your dream.

So let me ask you a question: If buying more expensive gas, more expensive tires, and even a brand new car isn’t going to get you where you want to go, shouldn’t you do whatever it takes to do two things... First, learn why you developed the habit of driving with your foot on the brake in the first place; And second, learn how to replace that very costly habit with a more productive habit that enables you to get you where you want to go faster, easier, and with far less effort. **PE**



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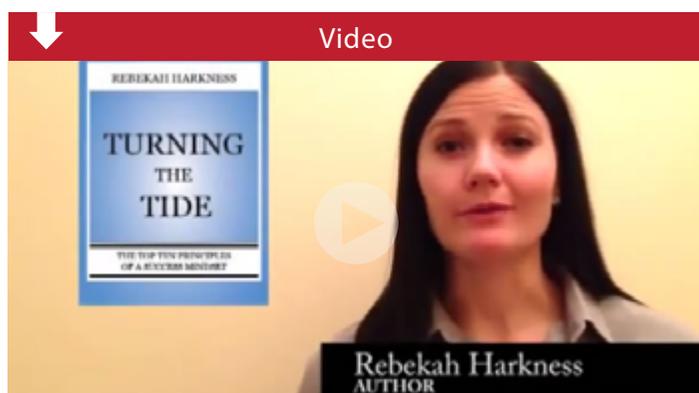


# Conquer Yourself

## Overcome doubt, fear, and anxiety

 By Rebekah Harkness

**Y**es, we are all human, and that typically insinuates mistakes, failure, disappointment, and emotional havoc. It is easy for us to dwell on our shortcomings and imperfections, but in order to reach your full potential, your focus and energy must be moving towards becoming more than just human. You have a unique opportunity in this universe to create your reality and determine your future. You are not a robot, but rather a divine being with the freedom of choice, and each choice you make is shaping your present moment as well as your future.



You are that infamous x-factor that you have been looking for all your life. The power is in your hands, but there are three human obstacles that you need to overcome in order to reach your full potential, namely doubt, fear, and anxiety. These obstacles apply to all of us regardless of our circumstances. They are simply a part of life and a part of our human experience. Your ability to overcome them will determine the quality of your life, your level of happiness, and your ability to reach your full potential.

Doubt, fear, and anxiety may feel a bit different on the surface, but they have many things in common in terms of where and how they originate. Doubt arises due to a lack of self-esteem, a lack of faith, and very little self-confidence. Fear is often our reaction to the unknown. Danger and failure lurk in the unknown, right? Perhaps - but we tend to over-associate danger with the unknown, and our fear of failure paralyzes us indefinitely. Again, lack of faith and self-confidence are key drivers behind fear. We tend to feel too safe in our habits and routines, and anything beyond that elicits a feeling of fear and anxiety. The anxiety builds as we start questioning the outcome and we align our expectations with negativity and impending doom. Our mind races as it contemplates various outcomes, but each mental outcome ends in negativity. What if I fail? What if I lose my friends? What if I get hurt? What if people laugh at me? What if they don't like me? What if the sky falls? The list goes on and on. Again, these feelings of doubt, fear, and anxiety are a part of our human experience, but there are three things that you can do in order to minimize their influence on your life and your results.

First, increase your level of self-awareness. Be willing to take the time and energy to recognize when feelings of doubt, fear, or

anxiety arise. Simply recognize and observe these moments. When you have time to reflect, be willing to ask yourself some tough questions. What sparked these feelings of insecurity? Was there a real threat of danger or was it only perceived? Look for patterns. Is there a commonality in the situations that bring out this lack of confidence and doubt? Does it stem from a belief that you hold about yourself? Where did the belief come from? Is this belief valid and are you willing to change it? After you have taken some time to reflect on these things, it is important to then take action and reconstruct the beliefs that are feeding these negative emotions.

Second, develop faith in yourself and in your life purpose. Faith is defined as being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see. Faith is driven by a subtle, yet confident, power of knowing who you are and where you are going. It is single-pointed in its nature and its energy is concentrated in one direction and one outcome. Fear and anxiety is simply misdirected faith. A lack of faith creates fear, doubt, and anxiety and allows an acceptance that the outcome you are looking for might not occur. This lack of direction and concentration dissipates the energy and weakens the potential of your desired outcome.

Faith is what gets you off the couch. Faith allows you to harness your emotional energy in a focused direction and therefore increase your level of activity and purpose. There is the saying, "Faith without works is dead." To state that more accurately, works without faith is dead. Faith is the fuel that motivates you to do the work. Develop this within yourself and the level of fear and uncertainty that you experience on a daily basis will lessen and become insignificant.

Third, expect the best. Get rid of all of those 'what if' questions that end in misery or negativity and replace them with positive outcomes. What if you do land your dream job? What if you do catch that break? What if they do really like you? Have a joyful expectancy of the very best. Don't allow yourself to welcome or consider an outcome that you don't want. For some of us, this is a complete 180 degree mindset shift, and it takes a lot of effort. Each time your mind wants to consider a negative outcome, quickly replace it with an outcome you want. This is an example of proactive thinking. Remember, you have the power to guide your thoughts. Guide them into positive outcomes and happy expectations.

Take control of your human tendencies and overcome them through self-knowledge, faith, and joyful expectancy. The life of your dreams is waiting for you just past the horizon of doubt, fear, and anxiety. **PE**



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# Planning Your Career

## Are you playing checkers or chess?

 By Sabrina-Yvette d'Almeida

**T**ake a minute to think about your career and ask yourself one question. Are you playing checkers or are you playing chess?

In checkers, you're in the moment playing move by move. Your goal is to one up or maybe even double up in the single instance.

Chess is a game that you play with the end in mind. It's a game of strategy. Every move is taken with the next three in mind. You're not concerned with winning every move. Every move is intentionally taken with winning in mind. Just like at work, where every move you make should be with the end game (promotion, recognition, new assignments) in mind.

It's the same with your career. You can play checkers, living move by move. No real plan or strategy but to win each solitary encounter. You won the email ping pong by having the last word. You showed so and so that they can't do that to you. You're living each day to one up the other person.

Or you can play chess. Where your moves are strategic and while not easy are still taken with an end goal in mind. You can have the courage to confront. You can be respectful in the face of perceived disrespect. You can do things that aren't your job because they are the right thing to do. You can align your everyday actions with your end goal. You can develop the ability to articulate your career goals and aspirations to anyone at anytime and your everyday actions match those goals.

Playing chess with your career is as simple as following the ABC's.

**A**lways

**B**e

**C**areer Planning

Your career plan is your strategy for knowing what you want and how you are going to get it. It's a road map that dictates how you respond in every professional setting situation. Your end game is your career plan. Your plan for the future must influence the strategic choices you make now. It helps you create a roadmap of consistent actions and behaviors that help you build the evidence you need to demonstrate you are ready for success. That success may be things like; a stretch assignment, leadership of a project and task, promotion and increased salary. Success comes in all forms and fashions. Accept that it takes many small successes to reap the greater financial rewards.

So what is a career plan? It's the task of identifying moves that you need to make to accomplish your goals. Self reflection and self-awareness is a critical skill to successfully implementing a career plan. The act of setting aside time for career planning is your first step in self-reflection and self-awareness and developing your career plan. A simple career plan might be to write out the "Then-Now-Next" approach.

Start by listing the knowledge and skills that have gotten you to your current state. List your skills, professional areas of expertise, any degrees, licenses, or certifications you hold. It's important to be able to articulate your skills and values. Really spend some time thinking about the unique skills you have developed over the years that can be applied across a wide variety of industries. Things like customer service skills, relationship building, leadership experience (whether of people, projects or tasks) and expertise in software like

Excel, Photoshop or PeopleSoft.

Then create a section for the "now". Create an outline for a conversation with your manager to determine if they believe you are fully competent in your current role. Be prepared, your boss may have a different view of you than you have of yourself. Your boss will be able to help you identify needed "now tasks" that should be mastered before taking action in the next step of your career plan. Do not get discouraged. Consider yourself lucky that your boss is giving you the honest feedback needed for you to drive your career. Implement any opportunities you have to grow where you are "now". Begin by working on any tasks or skills your boss identifies for you. If your boss believes you are fully competent then partner with them to identify opportunities to develop in your current role (assignments, being mentored, leading a task or project outside your current area of responsibility). Once you have identified and implemented any actions that can be completed where you are now, you are ready to start planning for the next stage.

The "next" stage in your career plan is where you identify your long term goals and identify what skills you will need in your 'next' role. This is where you begin to do research on the skills needed to be a supervisor, manager, task leader, senior, entrepreneur, or whatever your professional aspirations may be. Review job descriptions and become familiar with the needed skills, software, and educational requirements for your "next" role. Take that job description and look at it side by side with your resume. Do you have everything you need for the "next" role? Can you articulate examples of how you have already had experience with the tasks associate with this role? You may need to be creative here. You may not have managed others but have you managed cross divisional tasks? If you identify any skill gaps add these items to your "now" area and determine how you can create an opportunities where you are "now" to build or strengthen in the area where you have a skill gap.

Shouldn't you plan your career with that same level of strategy? **PE**



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# Are you Stuck?

## Catching a little courage for a new career

 By Sandra Ford Walston

**S**old your soul (again!)? Call it what you want, but you know the feeling. You've been at your job for over five years and you're stuck. It's all you talk about—how you're uninspired, how your talents aren't appreciated, how you feel invisible...But talk is cheap, and if you don't step up and do something about it (updating your resume, finding a career coach or learning new skills) you will stay stuck for a long time.



When you find yourself stuck in an unrewarding job doing thankless work, how do you move forward? Can you identify the obstacles that keep you stuck, behaviors like intimidation, apathy, manipulation or self-neglect? Once you see the obstacles holding you back, do you have the courage to overcome them?

If you feel like someone has clipped your wings, if you live with a sense of regret, if you live in blame, or if you have a hard time making positive career transitions, you may wish to implement these simple Dos and Don'ts:

**DON'T** stay stuck in conformity (a courage killer). Take the steps to eliminate apathy.

**DO** focus on instilling self-discipline and maintain a tough measure of accountability. Self-discipline thwarts any mediocrity that might keep you stuck in regret.

**DON'T** allow self-neglect to undercut your self-esteem during demanding.

**DO** declare your courageous intentions so you learn to motivate yourself from within. Hard decisions come alive in the questions, not the answers. Questions inspire actions. See events as opportunities rather than sources of apprehension.

**DON'T** allow yourself to remain invisible under the false pretense that blending in or staying neutral keeps you safe.

**DO** determine how courage can self-differentiate you and showcase your talents. The driver behind courage is the meaningfulness of *your* life. Finding what you love will be your brand trademark. This trademark communicates your spirit's purpose as well as your convictions.

**DON'T** let denial cause your career to stagnate. Staying stuck hinders courage consciousness.

**DO** remember this ancient Chinese proverb: "He who hesitates before each step spends his life on one leg." Stepping up reinforces your reservoir of courage, which sustains you until you are ready to take the next exciting step. Living in courage is economical—it cuts out a myriad of missteps.

**DON'T** linger in inertia. Inertia keeps us stuck in unfulfilling jobs and creates a false sense of safety.

**DO** rely on your courage to embrace change. Courage promotes the self-empowerment to rise above a "stuck" mind-set. A courage mind-set allows you to embrace the opportunities you face on your journey. Are you willing to give yourself permission to claim your courage?

**DON'T** stay stuck in blame.

**DO** work without regrets. Regrets are lost courage. Ask yourself: "Is some aspect of my personality constantly tripping me up, repeatedly causing regret and then placing the blame elsewhere?" Begin to notice your emotional triggers, the people or circumstances that set you off. **PE**

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**Sandra Ford Walston**, known as The Courage Expert and innovator of StuckThinking™, is a learning consultant, corporate trainer and courage coach. Sandra's expertise allows her to focus on the tricks and traps of the human condition through recognizing and interpreting courage behaviors and courageous leadership styles. Sandra's the internationally published author of three books: COURAGE: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman, FACE IT! 12 Courageous Actions that Bring Success at Work and Beyond and The COURAGE Difference at Work: A Unique Success Guide for Women.

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